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ABSTRACT

The theoretical and socioeconomic context surrounding collaboration among government, schools, and the workplace, as well as cooperative education, is in keeping with a shift in the relationship between schools and the workplace. In this relationship, schools aim to meet the labor force demands of the workplace and to encourage youth in the pursuit of their training, give relevance to the knowledge they learn, and assist them in their integration to the labor market. Cooperative education in Quebec is quite recent and not deeply rooted. It is supported by a minority of actively involved teachers, enthusiastic students for whom cooperative education gives some meaning to their current and future life, and parents who draw from it some confidence about their children's future. Although the importance and urgency of collaboration among government, schools, and the workplace have been unanimously recognized, the implementation of collaborative education is strewn with major weaknesses and incoherence at the government, school, and business levels. The most recurring aspect of such incoherence seems to be teachers', employers', and employees' corporate interests. The different groups resist changes in their work patterns and seek to gain a profit from the training work they will undertake. Furthermore, this training work has to involve little demand on them. Education officials have offered technical support to teachers involved in cooperative education, but politicians seem unable to release the funding essential to its success. (Contains 25 references.) (YLB)

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Paper Presentation

# INCOHERENCE IN THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT, SCHOOLS AND THE WORKPLACE: COOPERATIVE EDUCATION IN QUEBEC

**Theme: Creating Linkages: Government, Business, Education and Training**

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# INCOHERENCE IN THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT, SCHOOLS AND THE WORKPLACE: COOPERATIVE EDUCATION IN QUEBEC

## Introduction

Collaboration between the government, schools and the workplace proceeds from the current economic context of industrialized countries. The need to create these linkages mainly results from growing concerns about the consequences of market globalization and of fierce competition that regulate the commerce of goods and services. These effects have led to recognize the increasing importance of a qualified and well-adjusted workforce in the production process in force.

Cooperative education is one of the forms of educational activities the government, schools and the workplace select to create these linkages they officially desire. However, the forms such cooperative education takes, as well as the objectives it pursues, vary from country to country, even from region to region, as well as according to the study level and programs of the clientele it caters to. Today, we focus our remarks on cooperative education within vocational high school programs.

In this context, we briefly refer to the theoretical and socioeconomic aspects that define collaboration between the government, school and the workplace as well as cooperative education. Then, we will draw up a schematic portrait of cooperative education in Quebec using references from other countries to guide us. Following this, we intend to point out some of the most obvious incoherent elements that surround cooperative education in Quebec. First, we consider the inconsistencies at the government level, then within schools and their organization, and finally within the workplace. We will rapidly conclude by interpreting this incoherence

in terms of valuing and resistance inherent to the changing relationship between education and production.

**1. Theoretical and socioeconomic context**

The theoretical and socioeconomic context surrounding collaboration between government, schools and the workplace, as well as cooperative education, is in keeping with a shift in the relationship between schools and the workplace. On one hand, this shift aims to meet the labor force demands of the workplace. On the other, it also attempts to encourage youths in the pursuit of their training and to give relevance to the knowledge they are strongly "invited" to learn. This collaboration also seeks to assist youths in their integration to the labor market at a time when they are particularly vulnerable to unemployment. The urgency of this shift in the relationship between schools and the workplace has resulted in various studies and publications underlining the complexity of this transformation. These works also point out the need for numerous modifications in the relationship between schools and work, between training and employment, as stated in the following studies: (Adamski & Grootings, 1989; Anisef & Axelrod, 1993; Hardy & Maroy, in press; Jobert, Marry & Tanguy, 1995; Pautler, 1994), etc.

Some researchers, specifically those who work in a critical perspective, are concerned with the consequences of this shift occurring in the relationship between training and work. They worry about the quality of the training that is being given and mastered, and fear that future workers' empowerment is being restricted. Let us mention in this line of thought works by (Corson & Lawton, 1993a; Corson & Lawton, 1993b; Gregson, in press; Lakes, 1994; Simon, Dippo & Schenke, 1991), etc. Gregson's paper should be published by the end of this year, and was originally entitled, in English *The school-to-work movement and youth apprenticeship in the U.S. : Policy, possibilities and problems.*

Other studies question the relationship between training and work by focusing on the dynamics and difficulties of entry in the labor market, as well as on the possibility of finding a rewarding career within it. These works study both the social and psychosocial aspects, as well as the economic and structural aspects of entering active life. It is the main subject of these publications (Eckert & Le Goff, 1994; Gauthier, 1994; Gregson, in press; Lemieux, 1993; Méhault, Rose, Monaco & de Chassey, 1987; Pautler, 1994; Verdier, 1995), etc.

Cooperative education is often presented as a type of educational activity able to respond to the concerns mentioned earlier and to bring solutions to these numerous and difficult problems. However, cooperative education is rarely submitted to systematic research and analysis. Some recent works establish the principles and objectives of cooperative education, and present the different ways in which it is being implemented such as (Jedliczka & Delahaye, 1994; Monaco, 1993; Stern, Finkelstein, Stone III, Latting & Carolyn, 1994), etc. Other American studies evaluating cooperative education experiments are reported in (Stern et al., 1994) and a few documents (Nichols, 1990; Ricks, Cutt, Branton, Loken & Van Gyn, 1993) express regret for the lack of research and evaluation work on the effects or results of cooperative education. This all too brief theoretical outline requires further development in a different publication format.

## 2. Cooperative education in Quebec

Cooperative education at the high school level is very young in Quebec, even though it has been applied for several decades in post-secondary education. Therefore, we are in a diametrically different historical situation than that of Germany, the United States, France and Ontario. The German dual system has been implemented since the mid-1800's. Cooperative education in secondary schools was recognized in the United States within the Smith Hughes Act of 1917 (Stern et al., 1994). Technical high schools in France have been practicing a form of cooperative education since 1979 (Monaco, 1993).

As for our Ontario neighbors, they have been developing cooperative education experiments for 25 years (Nichols, 1990). Quebec, however, waited until 1985, when the federal cooperative education program was implemented, to progressively get involved in cooperative education activities.

According to an evaluation undertaken by the Programs Evaluation Branch (Direction générale de l'évaluation des programmes, 1994), between 1985 and 1992, Quebec had only sent 79 requests to Human Resources Development Canada whereas, for the same period, our Ontario neighbors presented 236 requests for funding. In this evaluation, it is also estimated that the rate of penetration of cooperative education is twice as high in Ontario than it is in Quebec. However, data obtained only a few weeks ago from the Programs Evaluation Branch confirms that cooperative education in Quebec is still growing (Riverin, 1995). There are now 90 high school projects in place, spread out in every region of Quebec, from the furthest to the most populated areas of the province. The great majority of these experiments concern study programs leading to a vocational studies diploma after ten or eleven years of general schooling plus the equivalent of a year and a half to two years of exclusively vocational studies. The cooperative education projects involve 25 different trades, with a greater concentration in secretarial, accounting and machining programs.

The formulation and regulating of these experiments in cooperative education have been developed progressively and are specified in a reference framework (Direction générale de la formation professionnelle et technique, 1995b) as well as within an organizational framework published in the fall of 1995 (Direction générale de la formation professionnelle et technique, 1995a). If we compare the characteristics of cooperative education in the United States as specified in (Stern et al., 1994, table p. 8) with those of Quebec, some differences appear: Quebec trainees are not being paid

for their work, while they are in the United States. However, unlike what is observed by Stern et al. (1994) in the United States, both the vocational and academic curriculum are integrated in Quebec. There is also, in Quebec, an occupational certification because 85% of cooperative education experiments are integrated in study programs leading to diplomas. In Quebec, and maybe in other relatively similar societies, the implementation of cooperative education sounds promising. It is, however, strewn with inconsistencies that impede and even compromise its development in various vocational study programs, as well as its speading among most schools.

### 3. Incoherence at the government level

At the government level, incoherence mainly lays in the contradictions between discourse promoting and even glorifying cooperative education, and the reality showing insufficient funding, which, as a matter of fact, is currently frozen. This is a direct consequence of the difficulties we are experiencing in the federal-provincial relations. Furthermore, this freezing of credits particularly affects the various areas of vocational training. Our famous referendum of October 30, 1995 probably made you aware of these difficulties.

More specifically, the Vocational and Technical Training Branch has appointed Mr. Jean-Eudes Riverin as Head of development to organize learning and cooperative education. Mr. Riverin has chosen a team of individuals who are well-informed on national and international cooperative education experiments. He also called upon experienced cooperative education practicians to develop the aforementioned reference (Direction générale de la formation professionnelle et technique, 1995b) and organizational frameworks (Direction générale de la formation professionnelle et technique, 1995a) for cooperative education. These two quality publications

should be distributed soon among all Quebec school boards[1] in order to support and to stimulate the development of cooperative education experiments.

These efforts within the Department of Education are reinforced by local work. A month ago, well-informed sources mentioned that 48 cooperative education projects were sitting on the Minister's desk following a successful quality control process. However, these projects are frozen because the Parti Quebecois government has not received the funds from the federal government. Furthermore, some sections of the Department of Education, as well as several other Ministers, are still unwilling to consult each other to release the funds that are necessary for the implementation of these cooperative education experiments.

Thus, on the one hand, the Department has invested time and money to development quality tools for the implementation of cooperative education, and to stimulate school interest. On the other, the schools are not receiving the financial support essential to realize these projects. While experiments already in place carry on, the contradictions within government discourse paralyze the implementation of new projects. Even though some discourse calls for rapid involvement in cooperative education, another focuses on prior investments made to improve equipment within vocational schools. Underlining these contradictory and sterile debates are two opposite views of training. The latter view training as spending that needs to be restricted considering the current efforts to control the provincial budget deficit. The former view training as an investment that may help the province to solve the crisis that has plagued, as in most industrialized countries, public finances and the economy in general.

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[1] A school board is a regional authority that manages schools functioning within its district. The school board is responsible for study programs, educational orientations, supervision and professional development of teachers, buildings, equipment, etc.

**4. Incoherence at the school level**

Even though schools administrators and educational advisers are in favor of implementing cooperative education activities, they leave it up to teachers to set them up and to follow up on them. According to Mazalon' thesis (deposit in December 1995) we supervised with Mr. Carol Landry, even the educational advisers who are most in favor of these experiments do not take any responsibility in the implementation of cooperative education within their school boards. School involvement in cooperative education seems to rest entirely on the shoulders of teachers who voluntarily take on this responsibility. These teachers must be very proactive, relentless as well as creative. Furthermore, when cooperative education experiments are implemented in new vocational programs, teachers must invest numerous hours and, as a matter of fact, they engage in voluntary service.

Although they are passive, schools and school boards use cooperative education as a tool to attract new clienteles, and to maintain the ones they already cater to. By doing this, they respond to pressures students and parents exert for more cooperative education projects. Thus, schools seem to benefit from the implementation of cooperative education. However, they keep these profits for their establishment and let teachers work with minimum tools to support cooperative education using their own work energy and proactivity.

Even though current experiments are successful and popular, quite a few teachers who are not involved in cooperative education show great resistance and concern. Actually, some teachers fear that the time students spend in the workplace will result in fewer teaching positions and may cost them their job. Moreover, these teachers do not recognize as work the many hours their colleagues spend in the workplace (Mazalon). Such visits in companies aim to find work positions for the students, to develop a training scheme with the

employers, to follow-up on students' progress and to evaluate them in collaboration with their supervisors.

An even greater number of teachers are worried as they welcome students back from their in-work training. They fear students will ask embarrassing questions or will challenge certain aspects of their teaching as they compare it with what they experienced in the workplace. This concern from teachers is particularly inconsistent with one of the characteristics of cooperative education. In fact, teachers who are in contact with the workplace develop and follow up on training schemes to ensure integration of the vocational with the academic curriculum. However, while they are pursuing their work, some of their colleagues seem or wish to ignore this experience of the workplace.

Thus, schools are the setting for much incoherence because the various schools agents occupy contradictory positions regarding cooperative education. These positions range from some agents getting involved proactively, to others showing resistance out of concern, while some are passively content because students and parents have an interest towards cooperative education.

**5. Incoherence at the business level**

There are two types of actors in the workplace: employers and unions. According to Mazalon, employers differ depending on their involvement in cooperative education experiments. The first group includes potential employers who will need labor force in the near future. They benefit from cooperative education as a means to select this workforce or to build a database of potential employees. The second group includes employers who have no recruiting capacity. The former group of employers collaborates more closely and are more involved in supervising the students they are entrusted with. The latter group of employers show less interest in following the training scheme that has been set up in collaboration with teachers.

In their official discourse, employers insist on the fact that they wish to be involved in the initial training of the labor force. However, teachers notice that even employers who are most in favor of cooperative education are hesitant to get involved. Employers mostly mention their lack of time to be available. Often, teachers must spend much time and show great availability in their relations with employers. Partnership does not happen spontaneously. Students and teachers must deserve employers' collaboration. Furthermore, some employers tend to unilaterally impose their conditions, while others only accept academically strong students. Thus, even though employers wish for the development of cooperative education, they only get really involved when they believe it will benefit them in the short or medium range.

Ten years ago, it was very difficult to implement cooperative education in unionized companies, while non-unionized companies did not necessarily welcome it. Unions and their members were unwilling and even obstructed the process because they worried that cooperative education would result in job reduction. Since then, resistance towards cooperative education has greatly diminished. Experience has shown that cooperative education is not responsible for job reductions. On the contrary, it requires that workers get involved in students' training. However, a number of unions are still concerned regarding cooperative education, and continue to fear that it may result in job reductions.

**Conclusion**

Quebec cooperative education experience is quite recent and is not deeply rooted yet. Cooperative education is supported by a minority of teachers who are actively involved and who seem to renew their sense of professional involvement within it. It is also supported by enthusiastic students for whom cooperative education gives some meaning to their current and future life. Furthermore, parents draw

from cooperative education some confidence about their children's future.

The importance and urgency of collaboration between government, schools and the workplace has been unanimously recognized in their respective discourse. However, as we have shown, the implementation of cooperative education activities is strewn with major weaknesses and incoherence at the government, school and business levels. The most recurring aspect of such incoherence seems to be teachers', employers' and employees' corporate interests. Thus, the different groups resist in various ways to changes in their work patterns. They seek, first and foremost, to gain a profit from the training work they will undertake. Furthermore, this training work has to involve little demand on them. As for the government, education officials have done a lot of work to offer technical support to teachers who are involved in cooperative education. However, politicians seem unable to give themselves the means to release the funding that is essential to the success of this undertaking, even though it is officially greatly welcomed by all agents concerned.

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